

Voice of the Mountains

AN ANTHOLOGY

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Belle Turnbull  
1882.-1970

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Front cover: Belle Turnbull, circa 1902

Title page: Belle Turnbull, circa 1913

Back cover: Belle Turnbull's home, Breckenridge, Colorado, circa 1955

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ISBN 0-9639119-6-1

Marion Street Publishing Co.

3930 South Swenson, Suite 810

Las Vegas, Nevada 89119

Printed in the United States of America

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## Introduction

This anthology of poems written by Belle Turnbull is for people who love mountains, especially the Colorado Rocky Mountains, and who are fascinated by the interesting men and women who lived there. Turnbull's magnificent poems, composed over fifty years between about 1915 and 1965, reflect her own deep love of the Rockies and capture the beauty and spirit of the Great Divide.

Belle Turnbull is the preeminent artistic voice of the Rocky Mountains. Her ability to hit precisely the intended image and emotion is unsurpassed. Through her artistry, she is able to convey the aesthetic purity found in a gnarled fir at timberline, the flight of an incandescent blue jay, and the "small magic" of a lover's embrace beneath "April's tender" mountain moon.

This extraordinary poet was born in Hamilton, in upstate New York, in 1882. Her father's ancestors were from the Lowlands in Scotland, and her mother's family, the Thurstons and Risleys, came from England and settled in the Hamilton area. In 1890, when Belle was eight years old, the family moved from New York to Colorado Springs, Colorado, and immediately became enchanted with the West. Belle Turnbull, in particular, began a lifelong love affair with the Colorado mountains and the people who lived there. Years later, she wrote of her arrival and her "conversion" to being a Westerner:

That was in the days when the streets of Colorado Springs were paved with pink gravel.  
The whole family was instantly smitten with Western country, happily exchanging trilliums for mariposa lilies, maples for cottonwoods, valleys for gulches. Steering a buckboard we made for the Rampart Range on every possible occasion. The West was and still is an adventure.  
(Turnbull, circa 1956)

Her father, George Turnbull, was the principal of Colorado Springs High School for many years. Apparently, Belle Turnbull's mother and father both died prior to their daughter's graduation from that school. After graduation, Belle Turnbull was, as she later put it, "shipped East to acquire culture at Vassar College." Returning to the East and the cloistered confines of Vassar was "no small wrench" for her. She felt that the East in comparison to the West was "a less vigorous land."

After graduating from Vassar, she "slid" into teaching, as many young women did, "almost without conscious choice" (Crown Publishers, circa 1953a; Turnbull, circa 1956). Her transition from studies at Vassar to teaching school was abrupt, perhaps as abrupt as the moves from New York to Colorado Springs and from Colorado Springs to Vassar had been. The transition was made even more difficult because she had received no teacher training in college. "You leaped from advanced study in medieval languages, world history, economics, science, straight down into the fearsome struggle of the adolescent to pass the [New York] State Regents Examination" (Turnbull, circa 1956). She taught high school in Westfield, New York, from 1905 to 1909 and in Buffalo, New York, for one year, in 1910. When the opportunity to teach at Colorado Springs High School arose, she returned to the West and her beloved mountains.

At the high school, Turnbull settled into her life as an English teacher and eventually became head of the English Department (Turnbull, circa 1950s?). The wide range of authors and topics she taught in her English classes appealed to her and brought her satisfaction in the years she taught there (1911 to 1936). Nevertheless, she was always "straining at the leash." Teachers in those days were expected to have singular devotion to their duties. As she later observed, "A woman teacher with a sideline [such as writing poetry] was seen as an unusual and somewhat perplexing being" (Turnbull, circa 1956). Additionally, she noted, there was "a certain

shamefulness about trying to become a poet" that apparently did not "jibe" with being head of the English Department (Turnbull, circa 1956).

Belle Turnbull had begun to write poetry when she was a child. Her first formal verse, written at age nine, was titled "The Canion [Canyon] Trail" and reflected her delight in and love of her "adopted country." She submitted the poem to her parents, and only years later she understood "why they were taken with choking fits and had to leave the room." While she was a student at Vassar, some of her poems became "embedded," as she put it, in the Vassar Miscellany (Turnbull, circa 1956). Writing became her chief interest when she was teaching in Colorado Springs.

Eventually, her poems began to find acceptance in the "little magazines," as she called them. At some point, Harriet Monroe, "grudgingly," as Turnbull later wrote, "accepted a six-line verse for Poetry," the gold standard of poetry publications at the time. Such recognition inspired her to work harder in order to offer more to Monroe. During those years, she recalled, she developed a lyrical style. Throughout her career, she maintained a dislike of sentimentality and "too much introspection," an attitude she attributed to her early training and Scottish ancestors. Of her early exposure to literature, she wrote, "While I was . . . let loose to roam untethered in adult reading, there were untakable jeers when I showed any sign of low [literary] taste." (Turnbull, circa 1956)

Why write poetry rather than prose? she once asked herself

Perhaps because when I write I am impelled to concentration rather than diffusion. There is something of the same satisfaction to me in getting a long train of thought into a couple of fines as there is to a boiler-down of maple syrup in getting the undiluted product of the sap. And I love rhythm: from childhood to this moment my desire has been toward drums. never had one; maybe the making of poems takes its place. Also, my prose won't jell. (Turnbull, circa 1956)

In the 1930s, while Turnbull was chairman of the English Department at Colorado Springs High School, she met Helen Rich. They shared a deep interest in writing and soon became lifelong companions. Helen Rich had been born in Sauk Center, Minnesota, in 1894. Before settling in Colorado Springs, she had worked as a reporter in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and had freelanced in Paris and California (Safanda and Mead, 1979, pp. 20-21). She had taken the post of society editor for the Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, but then realized she hated parties and became a top feature writer instead, covering the courthouse and the sheriff's office (Safanda and Mead, 1979, p. 21). In addition to her skill as a reporter, Rich was also a novelist.

In the years following their meeting, Rich and Turnbull spent extended summer vacations in Frisco, a small mountain community in Summit County, Colorado. (In the 1930s, there were only about twenty-five year-round residents in Frisco, with perhaps sixty or eighty in the summer.) The two women rented a cabin in this "tranquil and stimulating" place, finding the "rarefied air and colorful citizens" in the high mountains invigorating for both their personal and literary lives (Safanda and Mead, 1979, pp. 21-22).

After many years of teaching in Colorado Springs, Turnbull, as she put it, "jumped the gun with considerable recklessness" and retired. In 1938, Turnbull and Rich pulled up stakes and moved to Frisco. After two years of living in a rented cottage there, they moved a few miles south to Breckenridge, in the Blue River Valley in the shadow of the Ten Mile Range. The population of Breckenridge at that time was no more than 300. Turnbull and Rich occupied a small slab-sided house at the north end of French Street. That house— from which they enjoyed magnificent views of mountains reaching above timberline in all directions— would be their home for the remainder of their lives.

Although their small home lacked indoor plumbing, electricity, and a telephone, they did not consider such nice-ties to be necessities. Not surprisingly, Turnbull found her Vassar education to be of little practical value for mountain living. It was, for example, no help in dealing with frozen water pipes, breaking trail through a fourteen-inch snowfall on snowshoes, ridding the house of packrats, hanging a haunch of venison, or cutting up a "jag" of firewood for a Franklin stove. Turnbull did put her writing skills to one somewhat unconventional use when she crafted an impassioned love letter for a "mountain man" suitor in trade for ridding the premises of a pack rat (Crown Publishers, circa 1953b).

Turnbull adapted quickly, however, and was in time able to handle an axe and a saw with "considerable skill" (Crown Publishers, circa 1953b). Once ensconced in the high country, she also picked up another skill she had lacked prior to moving there; she learned to cook. She was eventually considered a "first-rate" cook and with "a couple of tablespoons of meat stock" could "dream up a sauce fit for a gourmet." Like many women of her generation, she insisted on using a wood-fueled stove for cooking and heating. Interestingly, in a reverse of the usual mountain sickness, Turnbull felt a sense of suffocation when she made periodic visits to the cities on the plains.

Although their home was simple—some would say sparse remnants of their roots in New York, Minnesota, France, and Colorado Springs could be found on their bookshelves and in some of their possessions, which included a silver tea set. Conversation with them was described as wry, sparkling, sophisticated, earthy. "Talk might range through Minsky's burlesque and Emerson to the statuesque bearing of Breckenridge's top whore on horseback, leading the Fourth of July parade" (Safanda and Mead, 1979, p. 25). Literati such as Thomas Hornsby Farrell, renowned Denver poet and newspaper editor, sometimes made the trek to Breckenridge to enjoy an afternoon of conversation and sample Helen's boilermakers (whiskey with a beer chaser). Neighbors often visited, and the living room in the house on French Street was at times the scene of intense but friendly poker games. Christmas cards sent from the home sometimes featured pictures of dogs. (Turnbull apparently loved dogs, and one of the verses in this anthology can be interpreted as a lament for a beloved dog.)

Although the residents of Breckenridge were supportive of both women, it is probably fair to say they were not overly impressed by the women's literary achievements. Turnbull's poems may have been studied in English classes at Summit County High School in Breckenridge, but not many people, not even the natives, seem to have cared much about poetry written about Summit County's mountains and people. And few beyond Summit County knew or cared about Breckenridge or had ever heard of the Ten Mile Range.

Both Turnbull and Rich were said to have had a salty, earthy sense of humor that endeared them to their neighbors. Belle Turnbull was remembered as friendly but somewhat reclusive and usually not seen about town. Helen Rich also was remembered as somewhat reclusive, although she worked as chief assistant to Susan Badger in the Summit County welfare office for many years.

In the early 1960s, Dr. John Smith (2002), for a time the only physician in Summit, Park, and Eagle counties, made house calls on Belle and always enjoyed chatting with her and Helen. He described them as "marvelous women . . . remarkable people." Smith said Turnbull, Rich, and Jane Robertson (a Breckenridge painter and friend of the two women) were "the most caring persons you could ever run into. They would fight for anything they felt was just."

One former resident of Breckenridge said he did not think most people recognized Turnbull when they saw her on the street in town, which was an unlikely occurrence. "French

Street at that time," he said, "was not a well-traveled street. Belle Turnbull was just another old lady as far as I was concerned. You never did see her." Helen Rich did the shopping for the household (Theobold, 2002).

Turnbull has been described as a small woman who, although she lived a long life (including thirty-two years in the high mountains of Summit County), was apparently in "uncertain" health by the time she moved to Frisco at about fifty-six years of age. A publicity release by Crown Publishers in about 1953 noted that her frail appearance was deceptive: "She is still frail looking, but has turned out to have about the same toughness as a timberline tree" (Crown Publishers, circa 1953b). She died in November 1970 at the age of 88 and was buried in Valley Brook Cemetery in Breckenridge. Helen Rich died a year later and was buried next to Turnbull.

The literary works of Belle Turnbull have fallen into obscurity over the past thirty or more years. Elizabeth M. Safanda and Molly L. Mead's sixteen-page article titled "The Ladies of French Street in Breckenridge," which appeared in the Colorado Magazine in 1979, is the most extensive work yet published on the lives and works of both women. In it, the authors say, Turnbull's "short but passionate verses, as well as her novels, accurately summarize the experience of living in a remote, rugged, poverty-stricken mining village like Topaz [Turnbull's fictional Breckenridge], or Breckenridge" (Safanda and Mead, 1979, p. 30). "It is impossible to overemphasize how central the physical environment [Summit County's mountainous terrain] was to the life and work of these two women" (Safanda and Mead, 1979, p. 33). Turnbull's years of exposure to the nature of the mining game in the high country, they suggest, were adopted and applied to her own craft. In writing, she was working deserted claims alone, in isolation,

sifting the raw material around . . . for nuggets of human wisdom, for veins of strength and persistence, for glitters of a spirit of independence. . . . [She] found a wealth of natural resources previously ignored by those who wanted to skim off the surface glamour, the overtones of adventure and violence, in their superficial attempts to romanticize and simplify the western mining experience.

(Safanda and Mead, 1979, p. 33).

During her first two years as a permanent resident of Summit County, Turnbull spent a great deal of time re-searching gold dredging. Gold dredges operated in the county until the onset of World War Two. When she began her research, Turnbull knew very little about the technology, but soon became quite knowledgeable.<sup>2</sup> Out of this research grew her first book, *Goldboat*, a novel written in verse and published in 1940 by Houghton Mifflin. The book's flyleaf reads, "Out of the Rockies comes a poet with a new type of song. In verse that is hard and tough, but with the ring of America in it, Belle Turnbull tells a love story and pits human honesty against human greed." *Goldboat* is the story of a gold dredger who comes to a fictional Breckenridge with two ambitions: He wants to operate a "goldboat" successfully, and he wants to bring his girl to live in the mountains. The main character gets caught up in the many problems that accompany the search for gold. The front jacket describes Turnbull as "a poet of the Great Divide."

The critics' response to *Goldboat*, Turnbull later wrote, was "as mixed as you might expect, though to my surprise it did not include censure of my background. Criticism ranged from hackneyed theme to You can lay it down; in descriptive writing, from adequate to breathtaking" (Turnbull, circa 1956). *Goldboat* is perhaps her most remembered work.

In 1953, Turnbull published a novel titled *The Far Side of the Hill*, her only published

book-length prose work. The story is set in the fictional mining village of Topaz, located in the Colorado high country. Topaz is probably set south of Breckenridge near the summit of Hoosier Pass. Like Breckenridge at that time, Topaz is a place on its way to becoming a ghost town.

Of *The Far Side of the Hill*, Turnbull said:

The motivation of this book has been many years of close observation of an element of our folk-fringe, the hardrock mining folk: their attitudes and background, their speech and cadences. And my life between mountain and plain has furnished ample opportunity to understand the contrast between their dwellers. (Crown Publishers, circa 1953b)

One reviewer noted that in the novel Turnbull might have been trying to demonstrate that life repeats itself, but each generation must relearn the unchanging facts of life. "But I don't think so," the reviewer said. "I think she wrote this amusing novel to entertain herself and her readers." He noted that her style was unique and delightful, and her touch as "professional as that of a surgeon; her wit as keen as a scalpel" (Lipsey, circa 1953, p. 2).

In *The Far Side of the Hill*, Safanda and Mead (1979, p. 28) suggested, Turnbull was especially successful in "delineating the interdependence between the residents of Topaz and their physical habitat . . . [characters] thrive on rarified air; the sparkling atmosphere clarifies their attitudes and values and reaffirms their commitment to their village and the adjacent mines." Turnbull's second bound volume of verse was a collection of poems titled *The Tenmile Range*, published in 1957 by Prairie Press, a small publisher in Iowa City, Iowa. The book pays homage to the Ten Mile Range— that wonderful expression of nature's art that forms the western mar-gin of the Blue River Valley between Frisco and Breckenridge and its people. The Ten Mile Range, Turnbull noted, is the geographical feature "under which I live" (Turnbull, circa 1956). Turnbull would have been nearly seventy-five years old when the book was published.

Most, if not all, of the verses in the book were written and published in poetry journals years earlier. Selections from the section in the book titled "At that Point Mr. Probus" (including "Time as a Wellspring," reprinted in this volume) were originally published in Poetry in December 1937. Turnbull received the coveted Harriet Monroe Memorial Prize from Poetry in 1938 for that poem and another. The award included a \$100 check. She was one of seven recipients of the prize that year; another was Dylan Thomas.

A Summit County miner archetype, whom she called Probus, appears frequently in the volume. "The Probus sequence," she wrote, "seemed to rise all at once out of my sudden release into freedom and maturity as a poet. It must have been incubating, though, in association through years with mining people of rich background and astounding vocabulary." She took pleasure in using the Italian sonnet form for the "forthright pronouncements" of Probus (Turnbull, circa 1956). The Probus poems are marked by irony, which she described as the sterner relative of humor; both, she believed, have a place in poetry. The inside flyleaf of *The Tenmile Range* states:

Two published novels, *Goldboat* and *The Far Side of the Hill*, have demonstrated her abundant skill as a writer, and *The Tenmile Range* synthesizes her talent in the more compact and demanding medium of verse. It reveals her mastery of the compressed line, but in the compression she has lost nothing of the style that is as large and vigorous and satisfying as the country in which she lives. The Probus sequence is a delightful performance, well de-serving the award Poetry gave it several years ago. . . Her style is as generous as the massiveness of carved granite, curiously mixed with all of the delicacy and flexibility of a graver on copper. . . the

perceptive reader will find not only what has been uttered, but, at times, that the unutterable has become an overtone above the reality of the printed word. (Turnbull, 1957)

*The Tenmile Range* is a magnificent work, fully reflecting Turnbull's great skill as a poet and her deep love and understanding of the mountains and the people who lived there. The work fully complements aesthetically the beauty and awe-inspiring character of those mountains. Although *The Tenmile Range* is a truly lovely work of literature, it did not sell well. Between May 1959 and March 1963, it apparently sold only twenty copies, plus twelve that Turnbull herself bought, and from 1957 to 1959, sales were also quite slow. One can only wonder why. Perhaps it would have been more successful in the hands of a larger publisher.

In 1957, the New York Times published a highly complementary review of *The Tenmile Range* written by William Meredith, the Hudson Review Fellow in poetry. He reproduced "Time as a Well-Spring" in its entirety, stating, "As a poem, it suggests the general excellence of *'The Ten Mile Range.'*"

In 1968, fifteen of Turnbull's poems appeared in a small limited-run volume titled *Trails*, published by Gallimaufry Press of Bethesda, Maryland. The book featured handset type on high-quality paper and a saddle-stitched binding. It included both previously published and unpublished poems by Turnbull.

In addition to the poems published in *Goldboat*, *Tenmile Range*, and *Trails*, about 125 previously published and unpublished poems by Turnbull are known to exist. One can only wonder how many other poems were published in outlets yet to be discovered. Doubtless many of her published poems have not been found and many of her unpublished poems have been lost.

Credit for the survival of known poems by Turnbull, especially those that were never published, is due in great measure to the archivists in the Western History/Genealogy Department of the Denver Public Library. Without those efforts to preserve Turnbull's manuscripts for the past thirty years, much of her work would likely have been lost. Breckenridge author Reverend Mark Fiester is thought to have been involved in depositing the Turnbull collection in the Denver Public Library.

The poems included in this anthology have been selected from Turnbull's published and unpublished works by the editors of this volume. The selection was based on the editors' personal evaluation of the poems and on their belief that these works are representative of the author's artistic range.

Belle Turnbull belongs to the Rocky Mountains—especially Summit County—and the Rocky Mountains were hers. She is the poet laureate of the Continental Divide, the poet queen of that grand domain where the air is thin and the light clear and bright, the world above timberline—in her words, "the meadow nearest heaven." Throughout her life, she experienced a deep and abiding love for the Rocky Mountains and the people who lived in them, and that love is expressed in her poetry. She is the Robert Frost of the Rocky Mountains. No poet, no other writer, has so skillfully and succinctly captured what we all experience at the sight of that magnificent geography where the waters of the continent divide. Should a substantial artistic movement—regardless of medium—ever take root in the Colorado high country, Belle Turnbull's poetry will have set the standard and provided the foundation for that movement.

Robert McCracken Karen Fischer

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The American Poetry Magazine  
The Christian Century  
The Colorado Quarterly  
The Commonweal  
Coronet  
Denver Post  
Empire Magazine, Denver Post  
The English Journal  
The Free Press, Colorado Springs  
The Frontier and Midland  
Lyric West: A Magazine of Verse  
Magazine of Verse  
The Measure: A Journal of Poetry  
The Mesa: A Quarterly Magazine of Poetry  
The Midland  
New York Herald Tribune  
New York Sun  
New York Times  
Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine  
Parnassus: A Periodical of Poetry  
Poet Lore  
Poetry: A Magazine of Verse  
Prairie Schooner  
A Quarterly Magazine of Poetry  
Railroad Magazine  
Saturday Review of Literature  
Smoke  
Talisman I  
Tempo  
Trail and Timberline  
Vassar Quarterly  
Voices: Journal of Verse  
Washington Post



Belle Turnbull at home in her later years

## Foreword

Needs must harry the Tenmile now:  
Hot in the channels behind the bone  
The words are up and the drum beats over,  
The drum beats over, the words must go.

Never along that range is ease:  
Things are warped that are too near heaven,  
Ink runs clotted down the pen,  
Verse has the twist of timberline trees.

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, February 1939 The Tenmile Range, 1957

## Mountain Road

Following the trail's will,  
Skirting round a boulder,  
I came upon a gravel road  
Across the hill's shoulder.

Rain had washed it maiden-smooth;  
And ô oh, but this was sweet! ô  
The only tracks I saw on it  
Were of a rabbit's feet.

The Measure. A Journal of Poetry, 1924

## Topography

The Great Divide is a full-sprung bow  
About that country, and its arrow  
Drawn to the bowstring north along  
Is the length of the Ten Mile, notch to tip.  
Stark is the streamhead, where the narrow  
Careless snowrills stop and go,  
Atlantic, Pacific, freeze or flow.

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, February 1939 The Tenmile Range, 1957

## Above Timberline

How am I to tell you?  
I saw a bluebird  
A bluebird incandescent  
Flying up the pass

And where the wind came over,  
The Great Divide came over,  
Invisible and mighty,  
He struck a wall of glass.

I saw his bright wings churning,  
I saw him stand in heaven,  
The bird's power, the wind's power  
Miraculously hold.

Now I will tell you,  
Dare my soul to say it,  
Speak the name of Beauty,  
Accurate and cold.

The Saturday Review of Literature, September 23, 1933 Trails, 1968

## Note on Rigidity

Now in the snow new-laced  
On the earliest arc of morning Is a flawless stencil traced Under the rose-grape dawning. Here  
launched a keeled breast-bow And the oaring wings aside: Freedoms a plane can't know Feather  
the blue-jay's flight.

The Free Press, Colorado Springs, Colorado, March 6, 1955

## Echo

Once  
across the black marsh-country  
measureless between death and burial  
swung your unconquered voice  
tolling my name.

## Mountain-Mad

Mountains cast spells on meô  
Why, because of the way  
Earth-heaps lie, should I be  
Choked by joy mysteriously;  
Stilled or drunken-gay?

Why should a brown hill-trail  
Tug at my feet to go?  
Why should a boggy swale  
Tune my heart to a nameless tale  
Mountain marshes know?

Timberline, and the trees  
Wind-whipped, and the sand betweenô  
Why am I mad for these?  
What dim thirst do they appease?  
What filmed sense brush clean?

Voices: A Journal of Verse Denver Post

## Colorado Easter

Mountains in midst, cloud-thatched;  
Brown foothill slope, snow-patched;  
Between grey scrub-oak trees  
Small, furred anemones,  
Flushed, lilac, washen blue  
God, did You ever do  
A lovelier deed than dress  
Pasque-flowers in hopefulness?

The Lyric West for April, 1924

## This Fir

Is a fir noble? is a fir  
jade-springing? Is a fir?  
Wind, hail upon it, sun  
upon it: to know sun upon  
this fir-tree, in the looping brain  
what flashes, what vibrations running  
cell to cell, and beauty born  
that moment out of a glue of matter  
on rod and cone hung upside down! Then  
when rod and cone and brain are gone  
and the last poem blown nowhere  
is a fir not, with none to care?

## Weather Report

Old Wind  
Stalks on the ridge.  
Snow simmers about him.  
Yet the fir-fingers have not stirred  
Below.

## Little Chris

Snow falls  
Over the place  
Where stopped a little dark heart  
That we loved:  
Already her tracks are covered

## Brother Juniper

Under the primrose cliffs  
Lives an old juniper,  
Claws like a hippogriff's  
Fastened round a rock.  
Warworn his trunk is,  
Rigid his fiber,  
Ribboned his bark.

For all his payment,  
Wrung as a tear is,  
Pale on his raiment  
Of ashen green:  
Four frosty berries,  
Issue of the ages,  
Juiceless and lean.

Washington Post, circa 1942

## High Trail

The trail is  
Thin, dear,  
Loneliest:  
The one road  
Vein-strait,  
The one road  
Wheel-clear,  
Foot-wise,  
Delicate:  
Thin, dear  
The trail is.

The Free Press, Colorado Springs, Colo., June 1, 1952 Trails, 1968

## Lode

Snow this year is early come  
Winnowing over the Divide  
Grounding the coneys yet unready:  
The boys are in from the Solomon.

Winter has skimmed them off their ledge  
Where the snow scuds and writhes away:  
Only one life toughs out its welter,  
A fir scrub swishing at its edge.

## Down Off the Mountain

Mrs. Ducane was mountain bred in Frisco  
Up along the Ten Mile.  
She was used to glory. Even her can pile  
Was superintended by their old heads.  
Beside the tomato cans and the peach cans  
Thundered the gray river  
From their ice-beds.

"I an the pack rats are putten out from Frisco,"  
She wrote her folks out yonder.  
"The narrow gage is shuttin down. I wonder  
If Ed the Bulk ull make it over the Pass.  
Art's cordin up now with the rope length  
Aint any more use for it--  
Off his windlas."

Mrs. Ducane is anchored off Pueblo,  
Up an alkali draw.  
She has for dump the untidy Arkansas,  
Who cast his mountain ways long ago  
Between two cactus stems she peers out westward  
Straining dusty eye-sockets  
Toward the far snow.

The Midland, Januaryâ€" February, 1931 The Tenmile Range, 1957

## Bomber Over Breckenridge

Lie still: not here the crater heaves,  
not here the hot stars shock and burst:  
Tune clangor out to silence, listen  
to the slow hum of quiet loves

which muted couch in moss. Lie still,  
drowse under the sun. Whittle your bed,  
your rooftree down, pile ranges round you,  
crevasse, impasse, unfathomed bowlô

Lie still, drink at the thin springs  
and mark dim woodbirds where they fly  
the farther sideô The farther side?  
yet in the air what gong begins?

what desperate great gong begins  
over the roofs of the cupola?  
Oh glorious, malignant Oh,  
Hell's dearest bird in on the wing.

Washington Post, i 944 Trails, 1968

## Pasque Flowers

The earth's in cataclysm,  
Being deprived of heaven,  
Yet round the wasteland these  
Punctual presences  
Stand up in amethyst,  
Mist whorled, unearthliest.  
Deep-footed against death  
Springs the returning wreath.

Denver Post, April 8, 1956 Tails, 1968

## With a Gift of Pine Cones

In that hour  
when you remember,  
forget the fly,  
recall the amber:

Say of her:  
But she would run  
about a hillside  
dry with sun,

wood-wild  
as if she were  
grey aspen's  
thurifer:

Green pitch  
she counted bliss,  
red cedar  
she would kiss:

Blue smoke  
thru cones of limber,  
cloud the fly,  
enchant the amber!

## Stone

I choose this lichenèd granite  
for your grave-stone:  
It has forgotten  
one who leaned for a while against it:  
I  
remember.

## A Small Magic

If I must forget  
April at the last,  
Let me still remember  
One thing pastô

April's tender moon  
Slipping down the west.  
With her milk-pale burden  
On her breastô

Your springing height  
Firmly crescented,  
Hollowed for my body,  
Heart to head

Till the little moon  
Died in the abyss,  
And you turned me reeling  
To your kiss.

If I must forget  
Aprils that are done,  
Let me still remember  
One.

## Long Lease

For since a rock's a long, long treasure:  
a rock, a root, a south exposure:  
the loan of these is our forever.

## Gold Dredge Under the Hill

Crew bellies down off the hill,  
the young bulls, the tough lads,  
none of your granddads,  
none of your weathered buff,  
none of your oldtimer stuff:

Let granddads carp and chill  
to watch her shudder down below,  
wag her front gantry to and fro,  
chew and spit her stony cud,  
thump her buckets through her mud.

## Extracts from Dom's Report

... Old volcanic mountains,  
Eruptive sheets of porphyry  
... Communion of values  
... Drift of the ice age,  
Fifty glaciers grinding  
... Breaking down of fissures  
Where the gold was molten  
... Rich float on the benches,  
Washed along the waters  
... Light auriferous gravel,  
Loam of the gulches  
... Fine gold on the low bars,  
Coarse gold in nuggets  
... Thirty million dollars  
Scraped from the surface  
When the place was booming

There is one oldtimer  
Still keeps a tomato can  
Brimmed with flattened nuggets  
Cleaned up at sundown  
After one day's sluicing.  
That was at the grassroots.  
Gold is still at bedrock.

Goldboat, 1940

Summit Gold Company  
Report to Stockholders  
November first

í No lean ground  
In all our proposition  
í Probable yield  
\$15,000,000

í Values readily gleaned  
All uncertain elements  
Now eliminated

í Life of this property  
Over 100 years

í Highest mining experts  
Consider your investment  
Utterly conservative

í Unforeseen delays  
Unprecedented winter  
Cleanup anticipated  
Within short period

í Dividend foretold

## Delinquent Tax List of Summit County

Only greyheads, pinched and few,  
High up the Valley of the Blue,  
Mumble the names that all men knew.

The Fisherman Mill, the Orthodox,  
The Silver Eel, the Prize Box . .

Gold boats munching up the Swan,  
Digging the pits they floated on,  
Virgin zinc in the Wellingtonô

The Wire Patch, the Ontario,  
The Royal Tiger, the Buffalo . .

Glory holes in Francomb Hill,  
Syenite, quartzite, porphyry sill,  
Level to level, mine and millô

The Silver Wedge, the iron Edge,  
The Rose, the Rose of Breckenridge...

Zinc, lead, silver, gold,  
Now you're hot, and now you're cold.  
Now you're cold.

## The Old Gal

She used to look pathetic  
In the Denver Union Station  
With the rust along her boilers,  
Like a seedy poor relation

Of the proud ones, the mighty ones  
That towered above her side,  
She squatting on the narrow gauge,  
They strutting on the wide.

But when she cleared the city  
And when she stormed the pass  
She queened it on her right of way  
With trumpetings of brass.

In plumes of black and silver  
She crashed the canyon gates,  
She rocketed through heaven itself,  
She snorted where hell waits.

The great have read her out of court;  
She's made her final run.  
From car-step and from tender  
Her homesick crew are down.

The busses roar between the peaks  
Where her old screened smokestack swayed  
But still I see the Old Gal  
Go ramming up the grade.

Railroad Magazine, 1937

## Hardrock Miner

Mountains were made for badgers, Probus said,  
And badgers for the mountains. And so long  
As I can claw a tunnel, with the strong  
Smell of the ore beyond, I shall be led  
To sink my pick in holes unlimited,  
To rummage in old stapes and raise the song  
Of victory too soon, all laid along  
Hellbent to crack a granite maidenhead.

And men-of-war may hoot and presidents  
Rock down the chutes to hell, but be going  
Soon as a patch of mountain side is showing.  
Soon as a bluebird settles on a fence,  
Two shall string out and beat it up the trail,  
A jackass first, a miner at his tail.

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, February 1939 The Tenmile Range, 1957

## Mountain Woman

God love these mountain women anyway,  
Said Mr. Probus. Not to say they're fair  
Or sleek with oils, for woodsmoke in the hair  
And sagebrush on the fingers every day  
Are toughening perfumes, and the sunstreams flay  
Too dainty flesh. But what remains is rare,  
Like mountain honey to a mountain bear;  
He finds his relish in a rough bouquet.

Days when their wash is drying, off they'll go  
And fish the beaver ponds. Hell or high water,  
They wade the slues in sunburnt calico  
Playing their trout like some old sea king's daughter.  
Hell and high water women . . . Steady now!  
Not all of them, he said. One, anyhow.

New York Times, June 29, 1938 The' Tenmile Range, 1957

## To Be Tacked on a Cabin Door

From everlasting space  
my roof shall fold you  
my bed's spare privacy  
restore, remold you  
my hearth's dispassionate eye  
alone behold you.

Empire Magazine (Denver Post) Trails, 1968

## Hotel on Larimer Street

Don't sigh at me for lovelies vanished,  
For the lost whorls of petaled fingers  
On a handrail once untarnished:  
Don't mince in mists of elegance:  
Now's now even in clouded mirrors  
That used to swirl with pink chiffons.

High-breasted struts this lark in yellow  
Stepping merry with her fancy:  
Look where that slick and spiral fellow  
Exists to wreath his tender fowl.  
You too, in nylon plaintive dancing,  
Double lovely, dance your now!

Talisman I, June 1952

### **Old Maid**

Would not countenance the tales  
of his lechery:  
Took her lip between her teeth:  
Spoke and set it free:  
He has ever been, she said,  
courteous to me.

## The Cabin and the Spring

You did not dream the cabin, after all.  
Wait for a little, while the quietness  
Seeps cool along the lesions of your soul.  
Those days you ripped the sweet blue silk of space,  
Bucking through heaven till your eardrums bled,  
Here stood the mountain hovering the meadow,  
Only the jays to clatter overhead,  
Only a cloud to cast its sudden shadow.  
Unlatch the gate at last, unlock the door  
On all your homely, cabin-smelling things,  
Pine-scent of pitch you left to bud the fire,  
Tin-blast of pails for water from the spring  
You did not dream that clear spring water flowing  
Before your coming and beyond your going.

Trail and Timberline, March, 1955

## At That Point Mr. Probus

### Time as a Well-Spring

I thought, said Mr. Probus, there was time,  
Time by the dipperful, time lipping, flowing  
Out of some plenteous spring where I'd be going  
With my bright dipper, frosting it with rime,  
Hoarding no more than God would hoard a dime,  
Slipping time over my palate, careless blowing  
Drops off my moustache, wasting it, well knowing  
There would be more, more always, soft and prime.

I've been some years at Stringtown, Probus said,  
Back in the mountain, mining molybdenum,  
Gassed and sent in again and lined with lead.  
Six years some few will last who stand the gaff.  
Sometimes where the machines bore, springs will  
    come.

I have to laugh, he said. I have to laugh.

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, December 1937 The Tenmile Range, 1957

## Marginal Notes

### Incident of the Hawk-Watch

To one who waited thirsty  
At her door  
They whispered she had died  
The night before.  
But though their hawk-eyes swept  
His self-control,  
Exploring for the havoc  
Of his soul,  
They got no sign until  
He turned to go  
And found her lovely footprint  
In the snow.

Poetry. A Magazine of Verse, July 1924

## Deep Music

Tonight thinking of your hands  
whose touch was deep music  
I stood beside your grave  
and the dark inward eye  
beheld their dissolution.  
Lacking your hands  
I have renounced eternity.

## Poet as Spider

Now the dawn rising,  
test the web, retire:  
Brood in the lacing  
nodes of your lair:  
Stir for no flutterling,  
Old Spider said:  
Lurk till the sapphire wing  
brushes the web.